

Don C. Sawyer III, Ph.D.

February 22, 2023

Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker, Sen. Winfield, Rep. Candelaria, and members of the committee,

My name is Don C. Sawyer III, and I am from Hamden. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony regarding HB No. 6659, an act concerning the state budget for the biennium ending June 13, 2025, and making appropriations therefor. **I am writing to express my support of EMERGE Connecticut™ as they seek to remain at their current level of support - \$500,000 per year - in the Judicial and Corrections budget for fiscal years ending in 2024 and 2025.**

Since 2011, EMERGE has operated as an Employment Social Enterprise based in New Haven, CT, for people transitioning home from incarceration. As both a nonprofit organization and certified home improvement contractor, EMERGE is able to offer paid employment on their construction, landscaping, and property maintenance crews. While earning a paycheck and building on vocational skillsets, EMERGE crewmembers engage in a series of programs designed to end the pattern of recidivism. Through peer mentorship, increased access to essential resources, and group curriculums that serve to de-stigmatize mental and emotional wellness, EMERGE's approach has yielded an 11% cumulative 2-year recidivism rate since 2011, and **just 3% of EMERGE's 2018 cohort returned to prison compared to 20% of people statewide.**¹

In 2021, this committee invested in supporting EMERGE's results-driven model in the wake of Northern CI's closing. You knew, as EMERGE did, that the reduction of Connecticut's prison population to its lowest since 1990 would have been in vain if there was no support for the people being released. EMERGE's impact was felt deeply in New Haven, the county with the highest number of incarcerated residents and the highest incarceration rate in the state.² **Because of your support in 2021, EMERGE was able to meet the demand of the increased number of returning citizens,** enrolling and employing 79 people in the first 18 months, and increasing their access to employment, basic needs, and mental health supports. In the first year, EMERGE alums experienced an 82% job retention rate, and our numbers continue to grow.

With Willard CI closing this year, Connecticut's reform efforts continue, making it critical that this committee continue its investment. EMERGE is asking for the same level of support, \$500,000 per year, to continue this much-needed combination of services.

With your continued investment, EMERGE is not only positioned to continue making an impact in New Haven but will also be able **to start up operations for the first time in Bridgeport.** I hope the investment in the men and women returning home to our communities through EMERGE will continue.

Sincerely,



Don C. Sawyer III, Ph.D.
Board Member | EMERGE Connecticut, Inc.

¹ CT Office of Policy and Management, 2022.

² Prison Policy Initiative, 2022